

What is claimed is:

1. A method for providing a covering physician service via a network, the method comprising:

informing a patient of a practicing physician of the availability of the plurality of patient terminals and referring the patient to one of the patient terminals upon agreement of the patient;

receiving at a call center, the call center enabling any of a first plurality of physician terminals to be in audio-visual communication over the network with any of a second plurality of patient terminals, a call from the patient at the patient terminal and routing the call to an available physician at one of the physician terminals so that the available physician may carry on a two-way conversation with the patient and visually observe the patient; and

permitting the available physician to make an assessment of the patient and to treat the patient.

2. A method according to claim 1, further comprising:

receiving information related to the patient at the physician terminal via the network.

3. A method according to claim 1, further comprising:

forwarding information related to the patient to the practicing physician via the network following interaction of the patient with the available physician.

4. A method according to claim 1, further comprising:

forwarding information related to the patient to a health care management system associated with the physician.

5. A method according to claim 4, wherein the health care management system is a healthcare management organization.

6. A method according to claim 4, wherein the health care management system is a point of service health care system.

7. A method according to claim 4, wherein the health care management system is a preferred provider organization.

8. A method for providing a covering physician service via a network, the method comprising:

informing a patient of a practicing physician of the availability of the plurality of patient terminals and referring the patient to one of the patient terminals upon agreement of the patient;

5 receiving at a call center, the call center enabling any of a first plurality of health care practitioner terminals to be in audio-visual communication over the network with any of a second plurality of patient terminals, a call from the patient at the patient terminal and routing the call to an available health care practitioner at one of the health care practitioner terminals so that the available health care practitioner may carry on a two-way conversation with the patient and visually observe the patient; and
10 permitting the available health care practitioner to make an assessment of the patient and to treat the patient.

9. A method according to claim 8, further comprising:

receiving information related to the patient at the health care practitioner terminal via the network.

15 10. A method according to claim 8, further comprising:

forwarding information related to the patient to the practicing physician via the network following interaction of the patient with the available physician.

11. A method according to claim 8, further comprising:

20 forwarding information related to the patient to a health care management system associated with the physician.

12. A method according to claim 11, wherein the health care management system is a healthcare management organization.

13. A method according to claim 11, wherein the health care management system is a point of service health care system.

25 14. A method according to claim 11, wherein the health care management system is a preferred provider organization.

15. A method according to claim 8, wherein the health care practitioner is a nurse practitioner.

16. A method according to claim 8, wherein the health care practitioner is an internist.

30 17. A method for delivering medical examination, diagnosis, and treatment services from a physician to a patient over a network, the method comprising:

providing a call center enabling any of a first plurality of health care practitioner terminals to be in audiovisual communication over the network with any of a second

plurality of patient terminals;

receiving a call at the call center from a patient at one of the patient terminals and routing the call to an available health care practitioner at one of the health care practitioner terminals, so that the available health care practitioner may carry on a two-way conversation with the patient and visually observe the patient; and

permitting the available health care practitioner to make an assessment of the patient and to conduct an examination of the patient over the network, including by a visual study of the patient.

18. A method according to claim 17, further comprising having the patient stand in the course of the examination, so as to provide a basis for a gross evaluation of patient condition.

19. A method according to claim 17, wherein making an assessment includes making an assessment in accordance with a protocol.

20. A method according to claim 17, wherein providing a call center enabling any of a first plurality of health care practitioner terminals to be in audiovisual communication over the network with any of a second plurality of patient terminals includes providing a second plurality of patient terminals such that unrestricted access to one or more of the patient terminals is permitted.

21. A method according to claim 17, wherein receiving a call at the call center from a patient includes providing a telephone in one or more of the patient terminals that permits direct access to the call center upon lifting the receiver.

22. A method according to claim 19, wherein making an assessment in accordance with the protocol includes making an assessment in accordance with a protocol stored in a database.

23. A method according either of claims 19 or 22, wherein making an assessment in accordance with the protocol includes displaying in real time a relevant segment of the protocol to the available physician.

24. A method according to claim 17, wherein permitting the physician to prescribe a treatment includes permitting the physician to refer the patient to a third party for treatment.

25. A method according to claim 24, wherein referring the patient to a third party for treatment includes referring the patient to one or more of a primary care physician, specialist, hospital, emergency room, ambulance service or clinic.

26. A method according to either of claims 24 or 25, wherein referring the patient to a third party includes communicating with the third party via an electronic link included in a relevant segment of a protocol stored in a protocol database resident on a digital storage medium.
- 5 27. A method according to claim 26, wherein the electronic link is a hypertext link.
28. A method according to claim 17, wherein permitting the physician to prescribe a treatment includes, when a treatment is being prescribed by a physician, communicating a prescription over the network to a pharmacy.
- 10 29. A method according to claim 28, wherein communicating the prescription over the network to the pharmacy includes communicating to the pharmacy instructions to be given to the patient pertaining to the treatment of the patient.
30. A method according to either of claims 28 or 29, wherein communicating the prescription over the network to the pharmacy includes communicating the prescription to the pharmacy via a hypertext link included in a relevant segment of a protocol stored in a database resident on a digital storage medium.
- 15 31. A method according to claim 17, wherein permitting the physician to conduct the examination is accomplished under conditions such that the examination is conducted without medical instruments at the patient terminal where the patient is located.
32. A system for delivering medical examination, diagnosis, and treatment services from a physician to a patient over a network, the system comprising:
- 20 a first plurality of health care practitioner terminals, each of the first plurality of health care practitioner terminals including a display device;
- a second plurality of patient terminals in audiovisual communication over a network with any of the first plurality of health care practitioner terminals;
- 25 a call center in communication with the patient terminals and the health care practitioner terminals, the call center routing a call from a patient at one of the patient terminals to an available health care practitioner at one of the health care practitioner terminals, so that the available health care practitioner may carry on a two-way conversation with the patient and visually observe the patient; and
- 30 a protocol database resident on a digital storage medium, accessible to each of the health care practitioner terminals, the protocol database containing a plurality of protocol segments such that a relevant segment of the protocol may be displayed in real time on the display device of the health care practitioner terminal of the available health care

practitioner for use by the available health care practitioner in making an assessment of the patient.

33. A system according to claim 32, wherein the relevant segment of the protocol displayed in real time on the display device of the health care practitioner terminal
5 includes an electronic link that establishes communication between the available health care practitioner and a third party.

34. A system according to claim 34, wherein the third party is one or more of a primary care physician, specialist, hospital, emergency room, ambulance service, clinic or pharmacy.

10 35. A system according to either of claims 33 or 34, wherein the electronic link is a hypertext link.

36. A system according to claim 32, further comprising a patient database accessible to each of the health care practitioner terminals for storing patient information.

37. A system according to claim 36, wherein the patient information is displayed on
15 the display device of the health care practitioner terminal of the available health care practitioner.

38. A system according to claim 32, further including a medication database accessible to each of the health care practitioner terminals for storing medication information.

20 39. A system according to claim 32, wherein each patient terminal is configured to permit the available health care practitioner to conduct an examination of the patient, including by visual observation of the patient, while the patient is standing.

40. A system according to claim 32, wherein one or more of the patient terminals includes a telephone such that a patient may establish a direct connection to the call
25 center by picking up the telephone receiver.

41. A system according to claim 32, wherein the protocol database is resident on a server that is in communication with each of the health care practitioner terminals.

42. A system according to claim 32, wherein each of the health care practitioner terminals includes a local storage device and the protocol database is replicated on the
30 local storage device of one or more of the health care practitioner terminals.

43. A system for delivering medical examination, diagnosis, and treatment services from a physician to a patient over a network, the system comprising:

a first plurality of health care practitioner terminals, each of the first plurality of

health care practitioner terminals including a display device;

a second plurality of patient terminals in audiovisual communication over a network with any of the first plurality of health care practitioner terminals; and

a call center in communication with the patient terminals and the health care practitioner terminals, the call center routing a call from a patient at one of the patient terminals to an available health care practitioner at one of the health care practitioner terminals, so that the available health care practitioner may carry on a two-way conversation with the patient and visually observe the patient.

44. A system for delivering medical examination, diagnosis, and treatment services from a physician to a patient over a network, the system comprising:

a first plurality of health care practitioner terminals, each of the first plurality of health care practitioner terminals including a display device;

a second plurality of patient terminals in audiovisual communication over a network with any of the first plurality of health care practitioner terminals, each of the second plurality of patient terminals including a camera having pan, tilt and zoom modes, such modes being controlled from the first plurality of health care practitioner terminals; and

a call center in communication with the patient terminals and the health care practitioner terminals, the call center routing a call from a patient at one of the patient terminals to an available health care practitioner at one of the health care practitioner terminals, so that the available health care practitioner may carry on a two-way conversation with the patient and visually observe the patient.